



PRISON  
UNIVERSITY  
PROJECT

PATTEN UNIVERSITY AT SAN QUENTIN

# COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

*Friday, June 8, 2018*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the San Quentin administration. In particular, we'd like to thank Captain Ray Escalera, Lieutenant Sam Robinson, and Lieutenant Donald Spurgeon, for their support over the past year. Thanks also to Warden Ron Davis.

For his support with the commencement ceremony, clearances, and the operation of the program, we would like to extend our thanks to Steve Emrick. Many thanks as well to Raphaelae Casale, Shannen Wright, and Christina Sanchez for their ongoing assistance.

For their efforts to keep classes running smoothly and all of their support in Education, we would like to thank Officer Sanford, Officer Reyes, Officer Barr, and Officer Steward, as well as the other custody staff who enable this program to run inside San Quentin's walls. Our gratitude also goes out to Officer Dolan, Officer Tristant, Officer Bock, and Officer Yatabe for their outstanding help in bringing our volunteers into San Quentin efficiently.

We also want to express our gratitude to the folks in the warehouse. In particular, we'd like to recognize Bob Cutting, who does a great job to ensure that we receive all the materials we need in order to run classes.

Additional thanks to Steve Pascascio for sound engineering and technical assistance. Thanks to Dwight Krizman and Lee Jaspar for organizing and performing this morning.

Finally, we give tremendous thanks to our volunteers and donors, without whom there would be no College Program at San Quentin.

With gratitude,  
*The Prison University Project*

*Following are excerpts from a series of interviews with the graduates regarding their experiences in the College Program.*

# PROGRAM

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## Procession of Graduates

### Welcome

*James King, College Program Clerk*

### Keynote Speech

*Jason Bell, Director of Project Rebound Expanded*

### Salutatorian Speech

*Jose Rivera*

### Performance

San Quentin Blue

*Richie Morris, Dwight Krizman, and Charlie Spencer*

### Conferring of Degrees

*Thomas Stewart, Ph.D., President, Patten University*

*Aaron Hiatt, Registrar, Patten University*

*Jody Lewen, Ph.D., Executive Director, Prison University Project*

*Amy Jamgochian, Ph.D., Academic Program Director,  
Prison University Project*

### Closing Remarks

*Jody Lewen, PhD., Executive Director, Prison University Project*

### Recession of Graduates

#### THE CLASS OF 2018

*Jens Brazwell*

*Harry Hemphill*

*Claudius Johnson*

*Craig Johnson*

*Nathan Mckinney*

*Gerald Morgan*

*Jose Rivera,  
Salutatorian*

*Darin Williams*

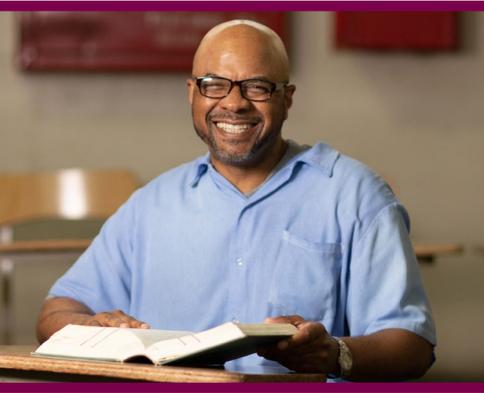
*Jeffrey Williams,*

*Valedictorian*

# HARRY HEMPHILL

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*This foundation is what's going to carry me through to a successful life.*



I came to prison with a 15-year sentence. The first few years of my incarceration I was at a different prison where there were no higher ed opportunities and I found my brain going to mush. Attending Patten University helped me reconnect with myself. I remembered that I am more than just an incarcerated man — I started believing in myself once again. This foundation is what's going to carry me through to a successful life: a healthy family environment and the ability to give back to my community.



I'd like to think that after every class I left a positive impression on everyone and helped create a healthy environment for learning. It was never just about my education, but also about how I could help others become the best they could be. I'd like to think I'm an example of what a diligent student looks like.



The lack of education is what sends people on a destructive path. To incoming students, I tell them to take advantage of this opportunity and really apply themselves and get all they can get out of the education — each and every class. Rise above just getting by and really apply yourself. The experience ingrains new habits you might find helpful in other areas of your life. Let this be a beginning.

# CLAUDIUS JOHNSON

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*Even though I'm incarcerated, I feel free.*



What I remember most about the impact of attending college was reading Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy. At the time I was in a struggle with my warped belief system. Item by item, Descartes realized his beliefs were all wrong. As I created my presentation for the class, I began to challenge things that I thought I knew and I scratched them off the list. I asked myself, "Is this working for me?" It was an "aha moment" — a chance to change my ideology. I saw that my conditioning had led me to believe certain things,

for example, that violence was the key to everything, and that my behaviors were learned. After the reading, I started attending self-help groups. These days I still want validation and acceptance, but now I'm being validated for other things. Like for never giving up. I have a support system of teachers and other students and I know I'm not alone. I'm nothing like the person I used to be. The reading changed my life and showed me that change was possible.

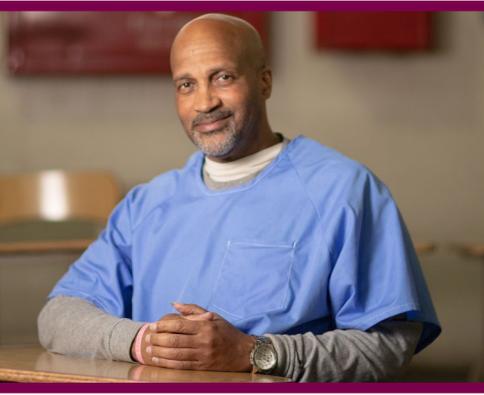
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Most people think people who are incarcerated are ignorant, hardened criminals with no feelings. I see that incarcerated people are people who are unfortunate in the area of pro-social skills. Our parents didn't have the best knowledge or education and they did the best they could. This could happen to anyone. And it has happened to everyone. When you know better, you do better. That's why education is the key to freedom. I don't have the chains of ignorance or violence anymore — even though I'm incarcerated, I feel free.

# DARIN WILLIAMS

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*Our pre-incarcerated educational experiences are diverse.*



The differences between correspondence classes and this educational experience are immeasurable. I'm light years ahead now. The Prison University Project's college prep classes gave me a strong foundation and taught me to view everything through a different lens. This foundation shows up in my everyday life. In magazine articles, papers I read, essays, in conversations, in politics. Now I can join in on the conversation because I have an idea about where people are coming from. When I'm reading a newspaper article, I can see how smaller

perspectives funnel into larger ones. I can see subtle dynamics playing out in the argumentation in the article. I see the mechanics of writing in a way I hadn't previously understood. I have a new tool set and a new lens through which to view this kind of dialogue.



I understand this after being in here for quite a while: our pre-incarcerated educational experiences are diverse. Some of us had little or no positive relationship with the education system. I was in the gifted program and an avid reader, but by the time I got to junior high I was veering off the path. The College Program encourages people with negative educational experiences, and gives them the ability to persevere, ask for help, and be vulnerable. The Prison University Project staff and instructors have all been cheerleaders for me. With the wide variety of individuals that come in here there's always someone that will teach to you in a way that you can understand. The students in this program grapple with each other to understand and see things in new ways. Every time I break through and understand something challenging I get a sense of accomplishment.

# CRAIG JOHNSON

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*I will always try to help my fellow veterans however I can.*



Ever since I served in the Navy I've been fascinated with the stars and the planets. So when the opportunity presented itself, I signed up for the astronomy class. I learned many things — what an astronomical unit was, the differences between the various types of stars, what dark matter is, and the plane on which the planets orbit the Sun. The best part of the class was on the last night, the instructors were allowed to bring in a couple of telescopes, and because of the lack of bright lights, we were able to view the planets — Mars, Jupiter, Saturn,

and their moons. We also gazed at the star Betelgeuse, a red supergiant variable star in the Orion constellation. I remembered the times I was out at sea, where on a clear night, the belts of the Milky Way were a sight to see.

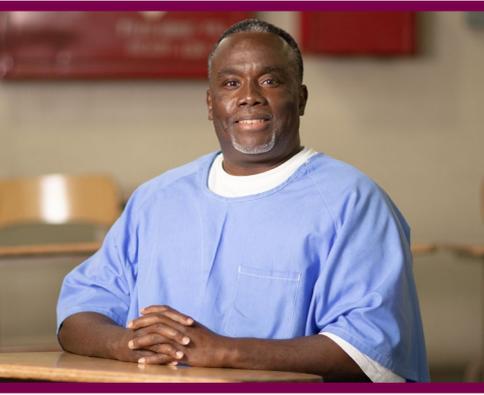


I served in the US Navy from 1973 to 1979, which included the final days of the Vietnam War (the evacuation of Saigon and the Mayaguez rescue). When I returned to the “world” (the US from overseas) I really wasn't welcomed like those who served before me. For many years after being incarcerated for my crime I had no sense of purpose. But in the late 80s, this changed when veterans groups were allowed to be formed within prisons. I've been involved ever since. For the most part, incarcerated veterans are forgotten — out of sight, out of mind. For those of us who served our country in the military in one form or another, we deserve to be recognized for that service. So today I feel good when men in here thank me for my service, and I will always try to help my fellow veterans however I can.

# NATHAN MCKINNEY

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*I dreamed of graduating from an institution of higher learning.*



As I prepare for graduation, I want to depart with a legacy of determination and perseverance. I want this legacy to touch not only the people inside of San Quentin, but to resonate with the community beyond this institution. Many times while growing up, I dreamed of graduating from an institution of higher learning. A higher degree was my idea of a stepping-stone to greater economic and social status, while experiencing the strong character development associated with collegiate camaraderie. Through the Prison University Project, my mission has been fulfilled.

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Education gives you a chance to demystify your life experiences, to articulate things that have happened to you, and to understand how your socialized beliefs are not really beliefs; they're just what you learned. Understanding socialization has greatly impacted my growth, and led to rapid maturation. I have resolved an identity crisis, and developed a fluid understanding of relationships with friends, family, and adversaries. I have better and elevated tolerance.

The self-realization and reflection was like a snowball rolling down a snow-covered hill — it wasn't a sudden revelation, it was subtle, a process. It all galvanized. When I realized I had arrived someplace new, it was an "aha moment" on a neurological and spiritual level.

# JOSE RIVERA

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*I was able to rediscover the person I was before.*



Being part of the Prison University Project has given me purpose. Throughout my incarceration, I had little to stimulate me mentally, or to make me feel as if I were doing something worthwhile. One of my sisters is a teacher and now our conversations have more substance and are at an adult level. Before, we could only talk about memories, and now we can discuss subjects like philosophy or the methods of learning that work best. I believe these connections have brought us closer as siblings.

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The College Program gave me something to look forward to and has not only given me an education, but it has also made me remember that I wasn't always a prisoner. Through my classes and interaction with teachers and tutors, I was able to rediscover the person I was before I learned the prison rules. Attending the college gave me more than a degree, it showed me life outside of these walls.

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I want people to understand that, although I committed a crime, I have looked at my life and my choices and have made a sincere effort to better myself. I didn't have to; I was serving a sentence with no real chance at parole. But I owed it not only to myself, but also to my loved ones, and I realized I owed it to my victim. There is a lot of self-evaluation in prison and, more times than not, a better person leaves than the one who entered.

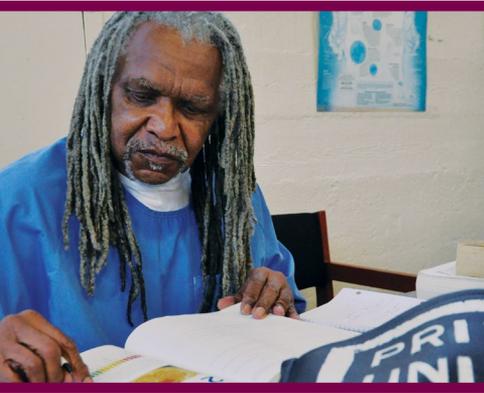
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My fellow graduates, "We did it!" We persevered through lockdowns, crazy schedules, cellie drama, and yard nonsense and we met our goals. But, this can't be the end. If this journey has shown me anything it is that education never stops. I intend to keep learning for the rest of my life. We have reached the last rung on this ladder but it is only one level. The sky is vast and our untapped potential has no bounds. When, not if, we go home we have to be the example to those we want to save from having to learn their lessons the hard way, the way we did. Our lives mean something. We have not allowed our minds to be idle; we have exercised our brains and now, our brains demand more. Let's give it to them.

# GERALD MORGAN

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*Today I am identified as father and grandfather.*



Prior to being institutionalized, I felt that prison would be the last place to find one's blessings. However, the Prison University Project has been just that, a blessing. The staff opened students' eyes, and my own to my many flaws. In my case, my flawed parenting skills. Child Psychology changed my eternal connection to my children; it gave me tools to see deep-rooted cultural problems that have existed through generations of my family tree, to see where I fell off the tracks with my children. More importantly, it showed me how to get back on track. This course was like defrosting

an iceberg. I realized I had been practicing the same ideology on my kids that my father had practiced on me. I wrote letters to all of my children. There was a time that my children did not know how to feel about me. Now, they aren't scared of me like I was of my father. Today I am identified as father and grandfather. The healing started with three words, I love you, words that I never was able to use comfortably before.

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I have found that individuals, like myself, are caught up in the system, simply by being submerged in a culture within a culture, in communities that have a different code of survival. Most never have contact with the criminal justice system until they are caught in its web. Today I have a better understanding. I know and I try to explain the black hole of incarceration. I want people to understand that without an education and without understanding the rules of the land, the justice system will continue to remove future leaders, fathers, family, and friends from their needed positions in society.

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I have always admired the instructors' and tutors' involvement with each student. Each has been influential in my higher education. I could start with Aaqilah who taught Child Development, which changed my relationship with my children. There were tutors who battled with my limited abilities to retain formulas to solve algebra problems. Tutors like Harriet who smiled year after year, overlooking my shortcomings. And Michael, who would ride his motorcycle through the rain on weekday evenings to tutor me. I can't possibly list anyone in the College Program staff without giving credit to all. But it would have come to an abrupt end last semester if Neil and Amy hadn't noticed that I reached a point of struggle where I had planned on giving up. This is why I say no individual was more influential than another; being that all the staff has one agenda, to educate all to the best of their abilities.

# JENS BRAZWELL

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*Don't forget to be good to others, even when it pains you.*



Many of the same people who have helped me to my success could also be blamed for my many failures. There are, however, a few who have had nothing but positive influence on my life. Here's a very, very short list:

Dr. Gordon Marshall, my very first college professor, and former state employee. A Doctor of Psychology who disagreed with the State of California's implementation of his chosen profession, yet, still found a way to bring us his healing personality, without it being a "treatment modality."

Bret Turner, Vincent Baum, and John Baum, people whom I've met on this prison term. People who don't pass judgment on me. People who have given me faith in people once more.

Kristy Lee Zipper. We met at a bar on her 21st birthday. She is from Florida, had traveled all the way to California to celebrate her special day with friends, and wound up spending most of her three-day weekend with me. It is the only "successful" love relationship I've ever had.

To my newest friend, the Reverend Judith Ann Glasse. She shines her light into the black corners of my darkness.

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Don't be in a hurry to have all the material things in this life. Be happy and content with what you have. Know that when you earn something, through your own hard work and effort, it will be more valuable than something given to you, or stolen. Intentionally hurting others is the continuation of the cycle in which you have been trapped, but you can spring yourself from the trap by being kind. Stay young at heart, be alive, go out of the house every day, dance, sing, enjoy your youth, love who you want to love and hope that they love you back.

Don't forget to be good to others, even when it pains you. No good can come of violence; take your aggression out in a positive way whenever possible. Stay humble, and do what feels good and bring honor to your family and yourself.

*The mission of the Prison University Project is to provide excellent higher education to people at San Quentin State Prison, to support increased access to higher education for incarcerated people, and to stimulate public awareness about higher education access and criminal justice.*